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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: OUTLAWED MAGYAR GARDIA MARCHES ON

REF: BUDAPEST 500 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. Summary. Defying authorities, the extreme-right Jobbik party swore in 620 new members for the banned Magyar Garda movement on August 22. In response, police intervened and launched legal proceedings against 176 members, including increasingly popular Jobbik President Gabor Vona. End Summary.

3000 AND COUNTING

¶2. On August 22, in the midst of the four day Hungarian National Day celebrations, approximately 1000 people gathered to witness a swearing-in ceremony for 620 new Magyar Garda (MG) members, raising the estimated total membership since August 2007 in MG associated groups to more than 3,000. The event, sponsored and organized by the extreme-right Jobbik party, took place on private land provided by a supporter in the village of Szentendre, north of Budapest. Jobbik originally planned to hold the ceremony in Budapest, but the Government denied its permit request, citing the court verdict in July 2009 (reftel) that banned both the Magyar Garda Association and the Magyar Garda Movement. Police entered the private land after participants marched in formation wearing the same uniforms used by the banned Magyar Garda organization. Police initiated legal proceedings against 176 individuals, charging them with "participation in the activities of a banned social organization." The police also subpoenaed Jobbik President Gabor Vona to appear in court August 24, at which time he stated he will file a law suit against the police for unlawful action to disperse the assembly on August 22.

AND IT'S A NEW MOVEMENT

¶3. Jobbik President Vona claims that the "New Hungarian Guard Movement" has no affiliation with previous MG organizations and therefore does not come under the July court ruling. However, legal experts expressed the view that adding "new" to the organization name - with the same uniforms and the same ideology as the MG - will not pass the test. A legal dispute is also unfolding, as Vona claims that police had no right to interfere with activities occurring on private property. However, the law on police activities clearly states that the police must intervene to address violations of the law, no matter the venue. In a radio interview August 24, a member of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, an organization often critical of Hungarian police actions, also endorsed the police response as "well-grounded."

¶4. Despite his subpoena, a very confident Gabor Vona

responded to the police action with a public threat. Commenting that Magyar Garda and Jobbik members took many photographs of policemen in action at the MG ceremony, Vona said that "these policemen will not have a job when Jobbik is in government following the 2010 general elections."

15. Comment. Jobbik President Vona continues to attract significant press coverage by challenging authorities over the Magyar Garda Movement's legality. In addition to the MG, he also announced plans to establish local "Garda Gendarmerie" citizen-watch groups to help ensure law and order in smaller towns and villages - an new twist in Jobbik's pitch to combat "gypsy crime." Vona's popularity continues to increase following Jobbik's success in winning three seats in the recent European Parliamentary elections. He now ranks sixth out of 22 in the August poll of Hungarian politicians - a four point gain from July - and amongst the other five party presidents, Vona ranks second behind Fidesz Party President Viktor Orban.

LEVINE